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DOC Offender Crews Help Fight Hilltop Fire on Larch Mountain

OLYMPIA – Offender fire crews from two prisons in Southwest Washington are helping fight a hilltop fire on Larch Mountain in Clark County. The offenders are working alongside firefighters to prevent the wildfire from spreading into the Yacolt Burn State Forest.

More than 50 offenders from Cedar Creek Corrections Center in Thurston County and Larch Corrections Center in Clark County work for the state Department of Natural Resources. The first offender work crew arrived Aug. 14. About one-third of the people fighting fires on Larch Mountain are offenders.

“Offender fire crews are cost effective and productive,” said Andy Aschenbrenner, Incident Commander for the Department of Natural Resources. “When it comes to really fighting a fire, the offender crews are our key resource. They are hard working, have good work ethic, and can get on the ground level where we can’t send fire engines. ”

“The partnership between DOC and DNR has positively impacted offenders while incarcerated and in the community,” said Secretary Eldon Vail. “And offenders are not only assisting with the preservation of our natural resources by fighting fires, they are learning vital skills that will enable them to be more productive citizens upon release.”

The fire is burning on a mix of private and state-owned property. The terrain is steep and rocky with heavy brush. Steven Hartsell, a public information officer with DNR, said the fire lines have been developed to control burning, and the fire is about 72 percent contained.

Offender crews will be let go to return to the facility as early as Aug. 21. Two crews from Larch Corrections Center will continue to provide assistance by patrolling the area and looking for hot spots.

A video of the offender fire crews is available on [YouTube](#).